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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Kenneth Phillip Williams, #281709,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Paul B. Wickensimer; John Newkirk; Clerk at Plea; Judge
C. Victor Pyle; Judge Larry R. Patterson; John Abdalla;
Susannah Ross; Aileen P. Clare; Greenville County
Sheriff's Dept.; Jerry Todd; and James Ken Burris,

Defendant.

) C/A No.: 9:08-2488-PMD-GCK

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) Report and Recommendation

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This matter is before the court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The plaintiff is incarcerated at Kirkland Correctional Institution. He has filed this action against two state court judges, an assistant solicitor, court personnel, several attorneys, and two employees of the Greenville County Sheriff's Department. Plaintiff alleges that the assistant solicitor did not handle his criminal case correctly. Plaintiff also challenges the sufficiency of the indictment, the process used to take his guilty plea, the advice given to him by his trial, post-conviction relief (PCR) and appellate attorneys, and the rulings handed down by the trial and PCR judges. Plaintiff claims that Sheriff's Department employees perjured themselves. Plaintiff asks to be released from the Correctional Institution.¹ He also seeks damages.

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Plaintiff, who is seeking damages, appears to be filing this matter pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff also seeks to be released from the correctional facility, however, this relief may only be obtained in a habeas action. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 500 (1973)(complaint or petition challenging the fact or duration of confinement should be construed and processed as a habeas corpus petition, while a complaint or petition challenging the conditions of confinement should be construed and processed as a complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983). The undersigned is treating this pleading as one filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. If the plaintiff wishes to challenge his confinement, he must obtain habeas forms from the Clerk of Court and file a separate action.

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act. The review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); and *Boyce v. Alizaduh*, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979). *Pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir.), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *See Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980); and *Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. *Fine v. City of N. Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2nd Cir. 1975). However, even under this less stringent standard, the complaint submitted in the above-captioned case is subject to summary dismissal. The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Department of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990).



Insofar as the plaintiff's subsequent conviction, related state court proceedings, and arrest are concerned, the § 1983 complaint is subject to summary dismissal because a right of action has not yet accrued. *See Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994):

We hold that, in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, or for other harm whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid, . . . a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such a determination, or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. A claim for damages bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has not been so

invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983. Thus, when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated.

Heck v. Humphrey, *supra*. See also *Schafer v. Moore*, 46 F.3d 43 (8th Cir. 1995) ("Therefore, in light of *Heck*, the complaint was properly dismissed for failure to state a claim."); and *Woods v. Candela*, 47 F.3d 545 (2nd Cir. 1995) (*per curiam*) (plaintiff's conviction reversed by state court in 1993; hence, civil rights action timely filed). See also *Brooks v. City of Winston-Salem, N.C.*, 85 F.3d 178 (4th Cir. 1996). Accord *Smith v. Holtz*, 879 F. Supp. 435 (M.D.Pa., March 24, 1995); *Burnside v. Mathis*, 2004 WL 2944092 (D.S.C. 2004).


Plaintiff has failed to establish that his conviction has been reversed, expunged, or declared invalid by a state court, and no federal writ of habeas corpus has been issued. Consequently, this action must be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

Moreover, to the extent the plaintiff seeks damages from the assistant solicitor, plaintiff's complaint is barred by the well-established legal doctrine of prosecutorial immunity. In South Carolina, regional prosecutors are called Solicitors and Assistant Solicitors. See S.C. Const., art. V, § 24; S.C. Code Ann., § 1-7-310. Solicitors are elected by voters of a judicial circuit and have absolute immunity for their prosecution-related activities in, or connected with, judicial proceedings. Absolute immunity "...is available for conduct of prosecutors that is 'intimately associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process.'" See *Buckley v. Fitzsimmons*, 509 U.S. 259 (1993) citing *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 430 (1976). See also *Burns v. Reed*, 500 U.S. 478 (1991). In this Circuit it is well settled that prosecutors are absolutely immune from liability for damages based on their decisions about "whether and when to prosecute," *Lyles v. Sparks*, 79 F.3d 372, 377 (4th Cir. 1996). See also *Springmen v. Williams*, 122 F.3d 211, 212-13 (4th Cir. 1997). Thus, plaintiff is not

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entitled to recover damages from the assistant solicitor based on his performance of these functions.

Likewise, judges are absolutely immune from a suit for damages from a claim arising out of their judicial actions. *See Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9 (1991); *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 351-364 (1978); *Pressly v. Gregory*, 831 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987)(a suit by South Carolina inmate against two Virginia magistrates); and *Chu v. Griffith*, 771 F.2d 79, 81 (4th Cir. 1985)("It has long been settled that a judge is absolutely immune from a claim for damages arising out of his judicial actions."). *See also Siegert v. Gilley*, 500 U.S. 226 (1991)(immunity presents a threshold question which should be resolved before discovery is even allowed); *Burns v. Reed*, 500 U.S. 478 (1991)(safeguards built into the judicial system tend to reduce the need for private damages actions as a means of controlling unconstitutional conduct); and *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985)(absolute immunity "is an immunity from suit rather than a mere defense to liability"). Consequently, the two state court judges that have been named as defendants are entitled to summary dismissal.



Additionally, the doctrine of absolute quasi judicial immunity has been adopted and made applicable to court support personnel because of "the 'danger that disappointed litigants, blocked by the doctrine of absolute immunity from suing the judge directly, will vent their wrath on clerks, court reporters, and other judicial adjuncts[.]'" *Kincaid v. Vail*, 969 F.2d 594, 601 (7th Cir. 1992). *See also Ashbrook v. Hoffman*, 617 F.2d 474, 476 (7th Cir. 1980)(collecting cases on immunity of court support personnel). For this reason, the defendant "Clerk at Plea" is entitled to summary dismissal.

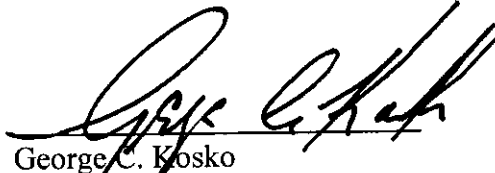
In this judicial circuit, it is also well settled that a witness in a state court proceeding cannot be sued under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 because a witness does not act under color of state law, which is a jurisdictional requirement for a § 1983 suit. *Burke v. Miller*, 580 F.2d 108, 109-110 & n. 3 (4th Cir. 1978). *See also Kincaid v. Eberle*, 712 F.2d 1023 (7th Cir. 1983)(police officer who testifies before

a grand jury has absolute immunity). All persons who testified in any judicial proceedings relating to the plaintiff's conviction have absolute immunity in an action for damages brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See Briscoe v. LaHue*, 460 U.S. 325, 327-346 (1983).

RECOMMENDATION

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the complaint in the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. *See Denton v. Hernandez, supra; Neitzke v. Williams, supra; Haines v. Kerner, supra; Brown v. Briscoe*, 998 F.2d 201, 202-204 & n.* (4th Cir. 1993), *replacing* unpublished opinion originally tabled at 993 F.2d 1535 (4th Cir. 1993); *Boyce v. Alizaduh, supra; Todd v. Baskerville, supra*, 712 F.2d at 74; 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A [the court shall review, as soon as practicable after docketing, prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to any grounds for dismissal].

July 23, 2008
Charleston, South Carolina


George C. Kosko
United States Magistrate Judge

The plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Court Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. In the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court judge need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must "only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation." *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005).

Specific written objections must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three (3) days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a) & (e). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
P.O. Box 835
Charleston, South Carolina 29402

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985).